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ABSTRACT

For the teaching of business report writing, ethical reasoning can be used as a heuristic for thinking that will encourage a more effective communication pattern for business students. Writing processes can be applied to thinking processes to help students approach theoretical concepts, make decisions, and write more effective business reports. A first step consists of demonstrating that the students themselves are ethical creatures frequently forced to make ethical decisions. Students must be shown that writing has to do with both thinking and ethical character. Providing students with heuristic devices for writing is important because they emphasize process rather than product, they provide alternatives, and they lead to rational conclusions and recommendations. When equating writing process and ethical reasoning, four considerations must be made: (1) timing--teachers should introduce ethical reasoning 5 or 6 weeks into a 15-week term; (2) text--the book used in the course should devote some depth to the ethical framework; (3) assignment--careful consideration should be given to fairly complex case studies; and (4) approach--the concept of an "issue tree" can help students write sound reports and make good decisions. A case study, "The Mismanaging Manager," demonstrates how a difficult personnel issue may be solved using issue trees and the utilitarian theory, the theory of rights, the theory of justice, and mentoring training. Finally, several student comments show that students have responded favorably to an approach joining ethical reasoning with report writing. (Six figures diagramming the heuristic approaches and demonstrating issue trees are included.) (HB)

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Ethical Reasoning: A Heuristic Approach for Business Educators

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Ethical Reasoning: A Heuristic Approach for Business Educators

Good morning. Today I'd like to present you with an approach to business report writing that combines problem solving strategies in the writing process with ethical reasoning. I hope to offer ways to use ethics as a heuristic for thinking that will encourage a more effective communication pattern for business students today.

My purpose today is to demonstrate how a process, that is essentially a writing process, can effectively be applied to a thinking process to help students approach theoretical concepts, make decisions, and write more effective business reports.

My approach is based on the work of two sources: Linda Flowers and John Hayes' methodology outlined in "Problem Solving Strategies and The Writing Process" and Iris Varner's 3-part ethical framework in her text Contemporary Business Report Writing. I will also discuss current studies regarding ethical problems in business today and what they mean to students and teachers of business report writing.

When I ask students in my upper division business report writing class why we should study ethics, I'm met with an interested but polite silence. I encourage discussion by asking what ethical situations they have to face -- either in the classroom or in their workplace. They mention everything from cheating on quizzes to "borrowing" a pen from the office supply room. Placing ethics so clearly within the realm of their own activities as students encourages them to identify themselves as ethical human beings. This is an important first step in introducing ethics in the business writing class. Students point out the absence of ethical behavior they see in the business world today. They mention junk bonds, insider trading, pension robbing, and corporate

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takeovers as examples of an absence of ethical behavior in business. Their concern was paralleled in Time Magazine's May 1987 article on ethics: "Looking to Its Roots." A survey connected with this article revealed that 76 percent of those polled regarding ethics in America saw "businessmen as contributing to tumbling moral standards." This same article emphasized the fact that many universities are struggling to incorporate moral concerns in business and industry through the introduction of ethics courses.

In her book, Tough Choices: Managers Talk Ethics, Barbara Ley Toffler identified the need managers have for the presence of basic moral principles such as honesty, promise-keeping, and doing no harm. Toffler's study noted that Human Resources or Personnel issues represent 66.1 percent of the most ethically pressing situations they face. Her study confirmed that of four elements involved in ethics, people are the first most important element. Managers also revealed that people-related issues are not abstract, yet addressing these issues in writing is often difficult.

Wayne Booth and Marshall Gregory note in their text: Writing as Thinking: Thinking as Writing: that "In learning to write better, we join the never-ending human project of trying to make life better for us all." An ethical premise, to be sure! Booth and Gregory point out the importance of avoiding the slanted language associated with advertising, and to recognize the denotative and connotative power of words and how they affect the decisions we make. Like Flowers, they maintain that writing is not like changing a tire: mechanical and pedantic. Writing has to do with thinking and with character. Thus, sensitizing students to the ethical distinctions between, for example, denotative and connotative word choice, and the ethical implications of "either/or" versus "both/and" reasoning can go a long way in helping them see the ethical imperatives of language.

Approached heuristically, writing is seen as a solution rather than a problem. As Flowers and Hayes have demonstrated, approaching writing as a goal-oriented, problem-solving, intellectual performance

often reduces the inhibitions students feel when committing their ideas³ to paper.

Providing business students with heuristic devices such as the Subject, Audience, Purpose formula, the five journalist questions, and the four-part Discovery-Draft-Revise-Edit gives students one method of development upon which they can depend when solving problems and communicating in the corporate world. (Figure 1). Such heuristics are important because they emphasize process rather than product; they provide alternative approaches to writing documents and solving problems, and they lead to more rational conclusions and recommendations. A heuristic approach moves students away from the narrow alternatives of (1) textbook writing, (2) hit-and-miss writing, and (3) writing by default (they write the only thing they can think of). I would like to suggest four considerations when equating writing process and ethical reasoning: (1)Timing (2) Text , (3) Assignment.(4) Approach

Timing

In my experience, it is best to introduce ethical reasoning 5 or 6 weeks into a 15 week term. By that time, students have developed some sense of themselves as writers and are ready to tackle a new concept.

Text

It is most useful to have a text that devotes some depth to the ethical framework. While report writing textbooks often introduce the concepts they do so in an often incidental way. In Contemporary Business Report Writing, Iris Varner devotes a chapter to ethics in report writing. Varner's discussion is useful because of the simplicity of the three-part framework she establishes and because she places her discussion within the context of business report writing.

Champion and James' text Critical Incidents in Management provides a number of useful cases accompanied by scholarly critiques that provide a good examination of ethical situations in business, however, they do not present an ethical framework. This text is a good source, though, for assignments or for use as a supplemental text.

Approached heuristically, ethical reasoning should also seen as a solution rather than as a problem. That is, using the Utilitarian Theory,

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the Theory of Rights, and the Theory of Justice as an approach to writing a solution to a business problem is just, if not more, valid and effective than applying the SAP formula, the five journalist questions, or the four-part recursive approach.

Varner discusses the dynamics of ethical reasoning within the three - part ethical framework of:

The Utilitarian Theory which requires that students consider the best interests of the entire corporation. They need to understand that ends justify means only if the greatest good for the greatest number is satisfied.

The Theory of Rights which often acts in contradiction to the Utilitarian Theory in that it recognizes the rights of the individual to be pre-eminent.

The Theory of Justice which is applied to either or both of the above theories looks at the action taken rather than the interests of groups or individuals. Its application is, of course, more complex. (Figure 2)

Assignment-Approach

I will briefly outline a fairly complex case I've used for some years: "The Mismanaging Manager". I do not know the source of this case since it was presented to me some years ago by a colleague who did not identify the textual reference. I use this case because it demonstrates to the students that problems can be solved in such a way that all three ethical theories (as presented by Varner) can be satisfied, and because it deals with the kind of personnel problem managers cite as being of primary concern today.

The case involves a younger, and newer, division manager -- Andy-- and an older but ineffective manager --Carl -- both of whom work at Buford Chemicals. Carl had been promoted three years ago out of friendship by the previous division manager; however, Carl is not supervisory material and Andy is just discovering that. Carl has pride in his position but cannot turn in reports when they are needed. Andy doesn't know what to do since he wants to protect Carl's pension and employment. Students are asked to send me a memorandum report explaining what Andy should do based on an application of the three ethical theories.

Approach-Issue Tree

Superimposing Flowers and Hayes' concept of an issue tree on Varner's ethical framework can help students write the kind of sound analytical report that helps managers make decisions, especially when it comes to human relations. As Flowers and Hayes point out, such a technique has 2 advantages in analytical writing : (1) students can see a graphic representation of how their ideas are related and (2) they can see where they have not covered key ideas.

This is particularly useful since ethical theories can seem, at best, abstract and theoretical. Because students do not readily see solutions, or "one right answer" in ethical reasoning, they become frustrated and insecure. Believing that no empirical formula exists and thus, they are bound to come up with the "wrong" answer, they over simplify in both language and thought. Instructor's can use the concept of an "issue tree" to show the relationship of theory to application and thus to the production of a written analysis.

Separate branches will help students see each individual issue more clearly so that when they come to the application as represented by the Theory of Justice, they can see the overlap.

Utilitarian Theory (Figure 3)

Under this theory we must look at the employees of Buford Chemicals. There are three central considerations: Management, Productivity, Morale, involved in this case. Since we are dealing with an ineffective manager we need only diagram one branch of the tree: management. However, a full diagram shows students the potential complexity of dealing with corporate personnel issues.

Our branching shows the interrelationship of Carl and Andy. We see that Carl is a good chemist but a poor manager while Andy is both a good chemist and manager. This dynamic is made clear verbally in the case as well.

Theory of Rights (Figure 4)

In this situation we do not focus on the concerns of Buford Chemicals but only on Carl and Andy. This is a 2-branch tree. This is less complex

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than the previous tree however we should point out that this does not imply that individual concerns are less complex than corporate ones. Given the facts of the case, we illustrate that Carl has two basic rights: (1) the right to gainful employment and (2) the right to be promoted. He has been a loyal employee of Buford Chemicals for 21 years, is proud of his work and wants to be a manager. We also see Andy's rights more clearly: he has the right to expect good management and the right to a successful division.

However, the conflict isn't clear until we diagram the Theory of Justice.

The Theory of Justice (Figure 5)

Immediately students can see the complexity of making ethical decisions when we begin to examine possible courses of action. An immediate response of "Fire Carl", when diagrammed, shows that this would violate the greatest good of Buford Chemicals -- they would lose a good chemist and a loyal employee -- and the rights of Carl, who was promoted to a position for which he was not qualified but in which he was allowed to remain with no support or direction.

This diagram also shows students that demoting or transferring Carl back to the Chemistry Lab, where he did so well, would only partially satisfy the rights of Buford Chemicals: we would at least have a good chemist. However, this action would satisfy Carl's right to gainful employment and Andy's right to good managers and a successful division.

Visualizing these issues for students helps them see the efficacy of the third action: Training Carl.

Mentoring Training (Figure 6)

If Andy were to "mentor" Carl, it would not only benefit Buford as a whole, but it would recognize Carl's right to be trained for a management position and it would recognize Andy's right to expect good management from his team. A Seminar for all Buford managers would serve to bring Carl "on board" and make him part of a team effort to produce the quantity and quality work demanded by his position. Students are often led to these conclusion without "treeing" the issues involved. But such an approach is important to present to students because it demonstrates, in a graphic way , the inter-relatedness of human and ethical issues. In so doing, this approach assumes the same philosophy of that of Flowers and Hayes' problem-solving strategies and writing.

It has been my experience that writing and ethical reasoning share the same characteristics and thus provide an alternative way for business educators to teach students how to solve problems more creatively and more appropriately in the complexity of today's business environment.

Finally, I'd like to share a few brief comments that students have made regarding report writing and ethical reasoning:

This will be the most useful for me in business

It enriched my personal experience and knowledge

This was my favorite. I had the most fun writing it.

This required a more thorough and complete discussion;

and my favorite comment:

"Using ethical reasoning helped the writing process become a journey, not a duty."

Thank you.

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SAP "Five" Journalist Discovery-Draft-Revise-Edit

Questions		
Subject	What?	Brainstorm
		Outline
Audience	Who?	Inter-
Purpose	Why?	Intra-
	When?	Group
	Where?	
	How?	

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UTILITARIAN THEORY

- Greatest Good for Greatest Number
- End Justifies the Means
- Group Rights

THEORY OF RIGHTS

- Constitutional Premise
- Due Process
- Individual Rights

THEORY OF JUSTICE

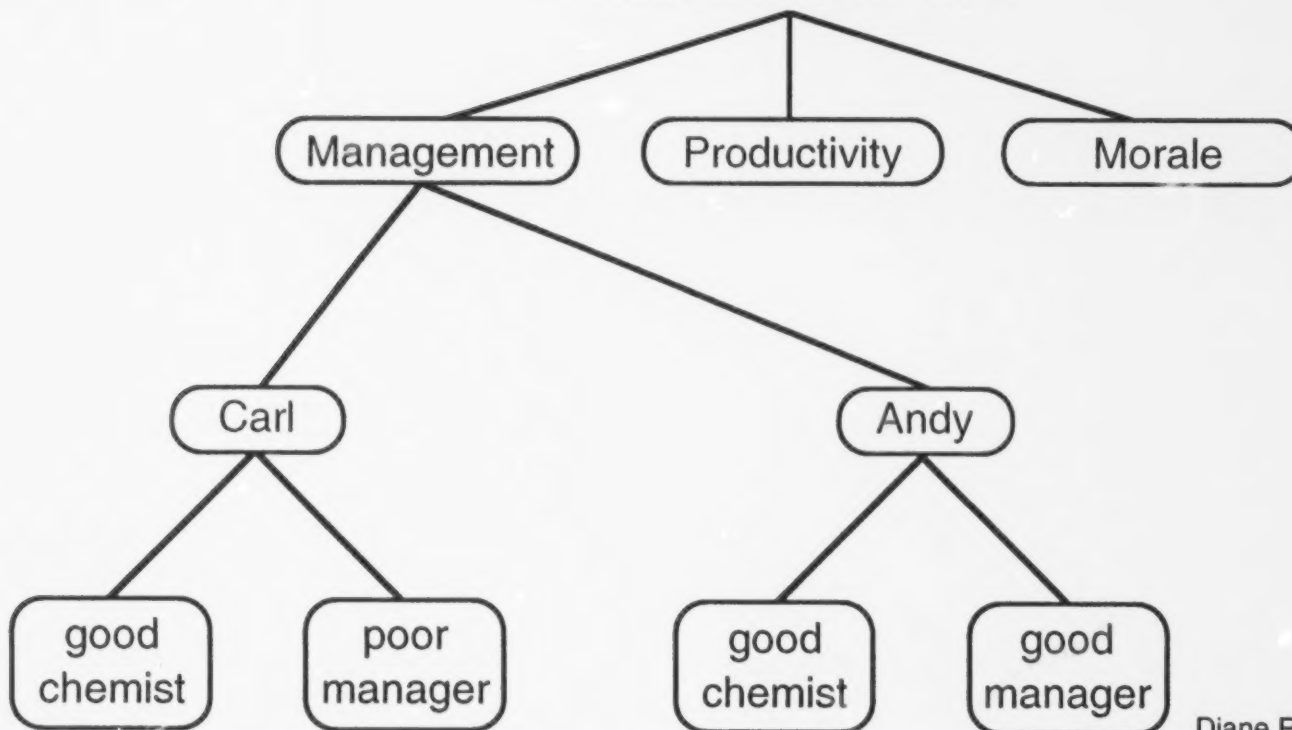
- Legal Premise
- Equity, Objectivity, Fairness
- Actions Taken

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The Mismanaging Manager I

Utilitarian Theory

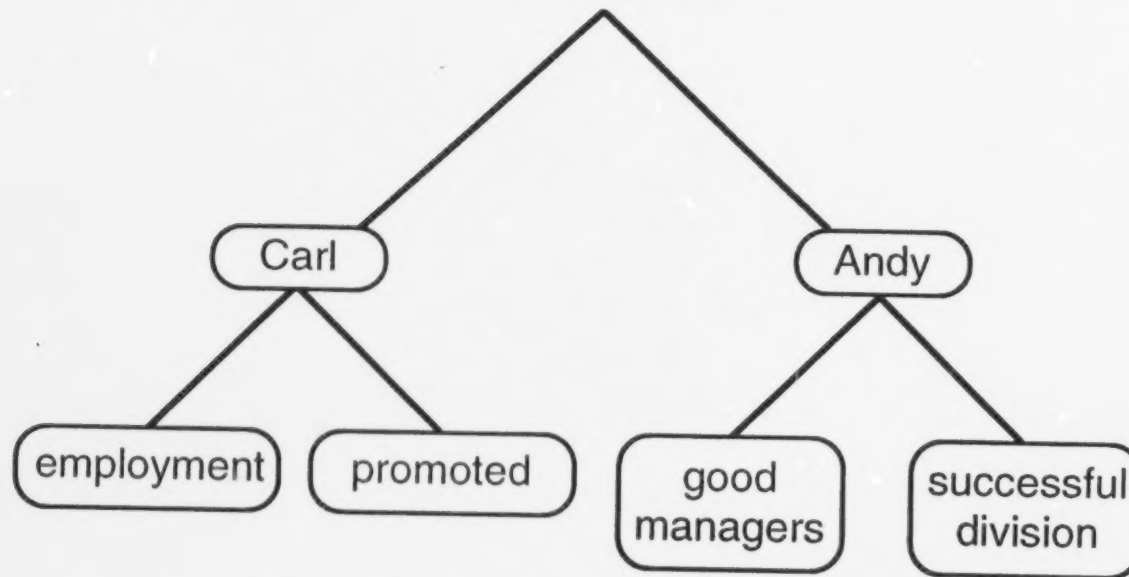
Buford Chemicals



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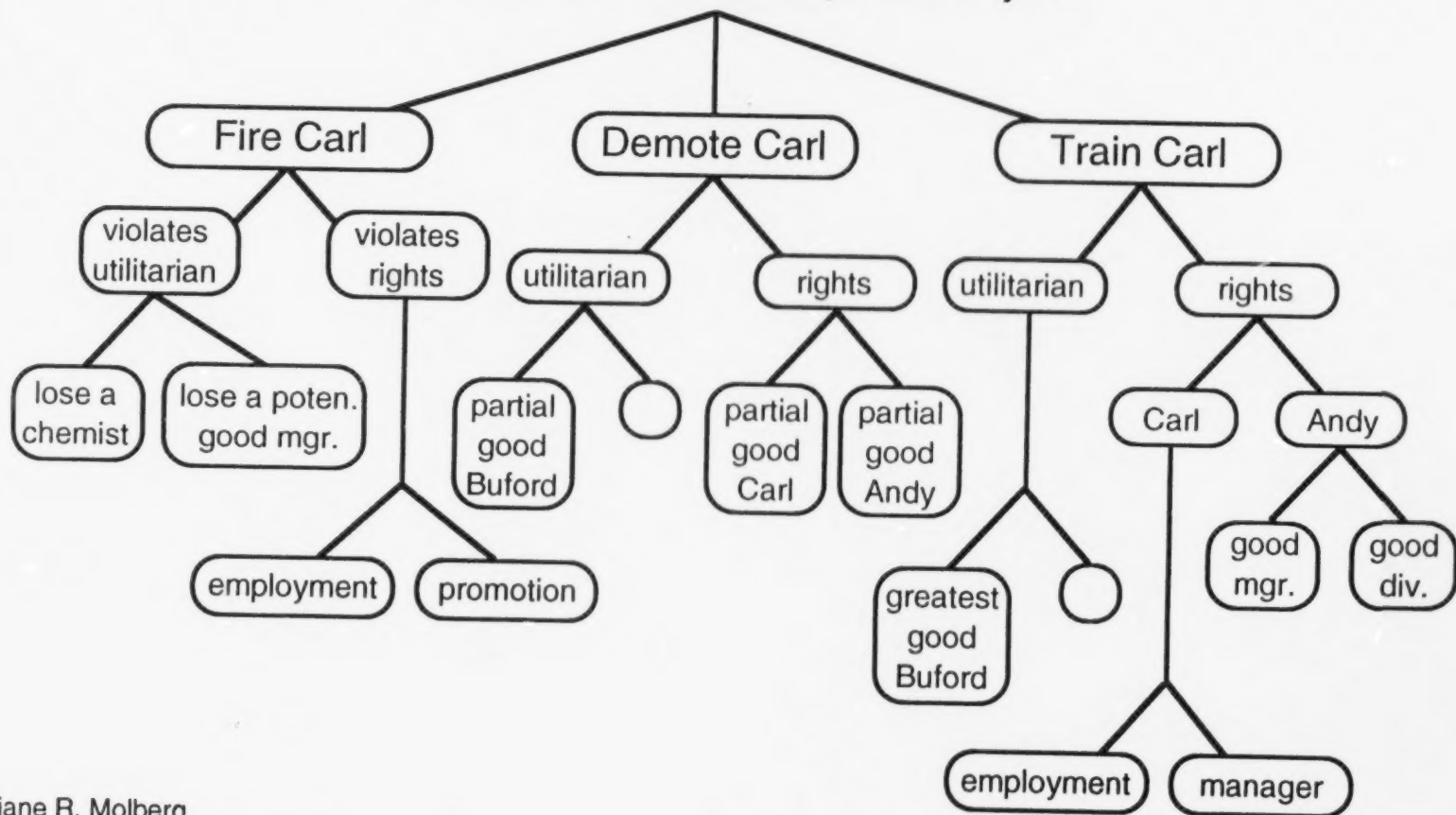
The Mismanaging Manager II

Theory of Rights



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Theory of Justice (Action) III



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Mentoring

Andy works with Carl

- Utilitarian Theory
- Theory of Rights
- Just and Fair

Seminar for all Buford Managers
Midwest Division

- Utilitarian Theory
- Theory of Rights
- Just and Fair

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